

Za Choeje Rinpoche
Being Aware of Awareness
July 1, 2023



Tashi delek. My name is Za Choeje. I am a recognized reincarnated Tibetan lama. That is why in our tradition, people call me Rinpoche. I generally go with Za Choeje Rinpoche as my identity. I also have an American nickname, Zach Lama. When I wrote a book, the publisher wanted my name to be shortened, so then I called myself Za Rinpoche. So there are many different identities.

I studied at the Drepung Loseling Monastery, which is a Tibetan monastery in India. The original monastery was in Tibet, and then we reestablished the monastery in southern India. When I was studying there, we had about four thousand monks, it is big academic, monastic university. I studied there for ten years, and I got my Geshe Lharampa, which is kind of like a completion of Buddhist studies.

Today, I am leading this Tricycle Dharma Talk on the topic *Being Aware of Awareness*. The word “being” is important because when we are aware of awareness or have awareness of awareness, then there are many things to be aware of. The most important form of awareness that generates in Buddhism is being aware of the truth. Being aware of the truth of what? It is the truth of yourself.

When we understand the meaning of being aware of awareness, then it will help us to understand the most profound truth. When we are aware of something like a flower—a flower is an object—then we use our mind as an observer of that object. And then when our mind observes the object of flower, somehow we know that we are aware of the flower. So what is that? How do we know that we know?

There are many different levels of understanding which, once we go deeper into that understanding, will help us to open our mind. So sometimes being aware of awareness is also what we call *open awareness*. Somehow, it opens our mind and helps us to feel the spaciousness of ourself. That is why this is a very important topic.



Before we dive deeper into this topic, we need to first settle down from the hustle and bustle of daily life. I will help all of you to settle with this little meditation.

So let us sit, relax, and connect with this present moment. In a Tibetan dharma talk, we always shape our intention in the beginning. So, we will use this short meditation to settle down and then connect with our body, our feelings, our energy, and our mind, and then I will begin this topic in depth. So, if you are ready, let us go into this short meditation.

You can gently close your eyes. Keep your body straight. And just let all the muscles in your body be relaxed and calm. Allow yourself to be in the present moment.

Let yourself be very comfortable in this posture. Bring your attention gently to your breath. Just feel the in-breath and the out-breath. Let yourself connect with your own body. Let your feelings be calm.

You will notice that there are many thoughts that are arising in your mind. Let them freely float without judgment. Let your mind be open like a sky, and let your thoughts be like clouds. Feel the spaciousness of your own mind.

Within that openness, allow yourself to have self-compassion and compassion for other sentient beings. With that compassion, let your heart be totally open. With that openness, set an intention. Generate the intention that you are listening to this dharma talk to understand your ultimate truth, and that, for the benefit of all sentient beings, you want to achieve enlightenment.

Intention is very important because this kind of intention will help you to understand more what you are going to learn. So now we will explore more on this topic: *Being Aware of Awareness*.

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Being is our natural state of mind. Our natural state of ourself is being in the moment. We are always in the moment, and that is why awareness is always there. And so, with this kind of awareness, when we can actually let ourselves be with whatever it is or whatever we are, we are primordially pure. Buddha taught that as *buddha nature*. All sentient beings have buddha nature; that is our being. When we are aware of our buddha nature, we are being aware of awareness from our highest ultimate form.

There are many different levels of being aware of awareness: from a conventional level and from an ultimate level. From an ultimate level, there is what we call *so so rang rig*, which means to be aware of one's own ultimate truth. This is an understanding that our mind is open by nature.

Somehow with so many different thoughts, what happens is we tend to close our mind. We are not letting our mind be open. That is why being aware of awareness, from an ultimate level, is like *so so rang rig*, which means understanding your own ultimate nature because mind is the actual thing that exists. In our existence, we have mind on one level and then matter on another level. So it is like there is matter, and then the mind observes it. How does the mind observe? When the mind observes matter, then the matter is an object, and the mind is an observer. But somehow in a dualism Buddhism, then mind is also a matter. It's kind of like dual mind and matter: matter is also part of mind, and mind is also part of matter.

When we are aware of that awareness, then somehow, what happens is we are actually connecting into the ultimate reality or ultimate truth of the mind. When we understand how our mind is aware of awareness, then we understand the spacious nature of the mind.

Somehow, in our day-to-day life, we tend to identify ourselves with many different thoughts that are beneath. That is why when we understand the ultimate awareness, we rise above these concepts.

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There is a beautiful example that is given in the Buddhist teaching: *namkha tabu*, which means the mind is like a sky, and all the thoughts are like clouds. There's also another metaphor: that mind is like the ocean, and the thoughts are like the waves.

When we get to that level of understanding, then we will not identify ourselves with all the different thoughts. When we are not aware of our awareness, what happens is we identify with all the different conceptions that we go through, like emotions.

When we are feeling sad, we identify our whole being with sadness. And because of that kind of identity that we let ourselves take on—*I am sad*—then we have little feelings of joy. When we put our whole being into joy, then we say “I am happy”. When we are feeling angry, how do we actually identify ourselves? We identify ourselves as “*I am angry*,” right?

So what happens is we are not letting our mind be like the sky. We immediately let ourselves get carried away into these different conceptions, emotions, and things that we are feeling and thinking. So that is what happens when we don't understand or when we don't reach that level of being aware of awareness.

When we actually understand how we are aware of our awareness, then we will understand how our mind is like the sky. And if we start to understand how spacious and open our awareness is, then somehow we will rise above the conception. So that is why understanding awareness is very important. Many times when we practice meditation, many people try to practice meditation by shaping or training their focus.

People think that meditation is just about training their focus, focusing on one object and then remaining focused on that object for a longer time—they think that that is meditation. Yes, that is one part of meditation, but it has to go above that. In order to be able to go above that, this method of being aware of awareness is very necessary.



So, somehow, when you rise above the awareness, where you don't identify even with your awareness you are above your mind and your thoughts. When you are in that state of being aware of awareness—being like the sky—somehow, that will help us feel more spacious and open. That is freedom. There is a great freedom in that: you will not feel caught up in many different parts that are arising in your daily life.

This profound method of letting yourself be aware of awareness is a very profound teaching that was given by Buddha Shakyamuni and then carried into Tibet.

There are different terminologies that are used to reference this teaching. There is Dzogchen practice. Dzogchen practice is mostly focused on awareness and understanding how the mind is actually totally complete. There is another teaching that later was titled *mahamudra*, which is also the practice of how to reach that level of being aware of awareness.

If I put this teaching in simple language that everybody can understand, just let your mind be open like the sky. Just practice that. Let your mind be open like the sky, and then let all the thoughts float freely like clouds. Let yourself remain in that state, and then you will actually experience being aware of awareness in your day-to-day life.

You don't need any specific philosophical or religious background. Personally, I've found that being aware of awareness in my day-to-day life is very helpful because when situations arise, instead of letting myself get carried away or dragged into the situation, you just pull yourself out of the situation. You just pull your mind out of the situation and let your mind be like a sky, looking at the situation above, not from underneath.

If you let yourself be underneath the situation, then what happens is we bring the situation so close, and we are underneath it. It's like you have a small rock in your hand, and you're bringing it so close to your eyes that it feels like you are under a big, huge rock when actually, it is just a

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small rock. It's just perspective. We tend to look at the situation from underneath and so close that we exaggerate the situation, and then we make that situation so big. Then we think, "*This is what my life is; I am just crushed by this.*" In reality, if you look at it from above, it's not a big, big thing. It's just a small rock.

That is open awareness. When you understand and let yourself be aware of the awareness, then you will understand and not let yourself get carried away by the situation. Many situations are not real situations—they are mental situations.

Out of all the situations, maybe ninety percent of situations that we think are real situations are actually our mind-made situations. So, when you understand and let yourself be aware of awareness, then you rise above the situation.

That is personally very helpful. It is not some sort of religious or philosophical thing, so don't take it as a religious or philosophical thing. Just use it as a very profound method to free yourself from all the thoughts and make yourself more spacious, open, and free.

That is *Being Aware of Awareness*. Thank you all very much. I hope this will bring some openness, spaciousness, and peace in your mind and in your life. Thank you.